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DECORATION OF GRAVES OF NEGROES IN SOUTH CAROLINA.

DURING a recent sojourn in Columbia, S. C., my attention was directed to the cemetery for the poorer negroes. It is situated on the edge of the town, overlooking the Congaree; the numerous graves are decorated with a variety of objects, sometimes arranged with careful symmetry, but more often placed around the margins without regard to order. These objects include oyster-shells, white pebbles, fragments of crockery of every description, glass bottles, and nondescript bric-a-brac of a cheap sort,—all more or less broken and useless. The large number of medicine bottles on some graves has suggested that the bottles once held the medicines that killed the patients.

Inquiry of residents as to the origin and significance of this custom elicited no satisfactory explanation, and I was in doubt until the April number of the "Century" reached me. In Mr. E. J. Glave's article, "Fetishism in Congo Land," there is an engraving of the grave of a Congo chieftain that would do very well for the picture of one in the Potters' Field, Columbia, S. C. The author writes of this grave: "The natives mark the final resting-places of their friends by ornamenting their graves with crockery, empty bottles, old cooking-pots, etc., all of which articles are rendered useless by being cracked, or perforated with holes. Were this precaution not taken, the grotesque decorations would be stolen."

The negroes of South Carolina are simply following the customs of their savage ancestors, and are unwittingly perpetuating the fetishism so deeply impressed. Some of the negroes on the coast islands still preserve an imperfect knowledge of the native dialects of their forefathers, and in decorating the graves of the departed they afford an illustration of the long survival of customs the meaning of which has been quite forgotten by those practising them.

H. Carrington Bolton.